

# VA Scandal Spotlights Bush/Obama Killer Takedown of Medical Capacity

by Carl Osgood

May 17—New charges have come to the fore that wait-times for visits and treatment in parts of the Veterans Affairs medical system are far longer than its stated goal of 14 days; records are being falsified; and deaths have resulted. In fact, these recent charges come atop a pattern going back years, associated with the deliberate contraction of the U.S. military and veteran medical system begun under George W. Bush, and continued under Barack Obama. All the while, the Bush/Obama administrations have sent millions of young men and women to Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, and elsewhere to face danger, disability, and death, on behalf of London's war policy. Now, the VA medical system cannot provide timely care for the 6.5 million active enrollees. The process is directly parallel to the 2010 Affordable Care Act, in which you sign up, then don't get care.

What's called for is the removal of Obama from office and this British Empire killing policy from our government. Some are calling for sacking Gen. Eric Shinseki, Secretary of the VA, former Army Chief of Staff, and a fervent advocate for the veterans; Shinseki himself has recently suspended three top VA officials in Phoenix, Ariz. He has commissioned a VA Inspector General investigation and an internal audit of the appointing system throughout the VA medical system. But, it's Obama, the London flunky-in-charge, who is responsible for the killer policy.

## A Long-Term Policy

The dramatic contraction in the network of U.S. military base and Veterans Affairs facilities saw two big waves of closures of infrastructure, with a net loss of capacity, that while the Cheney/Bush/Obama war machine was in full gear, grinding up millions of lives.

**BRAC:** 2005 saw the initiation of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's Base Realignment and Closing process, which resulted in the selective closure and/or sell-off of 33 major sites and 775 smaller installations,

several of which were associated with medical capacity: Walter Reed Army Medical Center, located on prime Washington, D.C. real estate, was closed; several other facilities, notably the Air Force's Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB, Texas, were realigned to reduce capacity.

**CARES:** In 2004, the CARES—Capital Asset Alignment for Advanced Services—was initiated by the Bush-Cheney Veterans Affairs Department. The PriceWaterhouse accounting firm was hired to list which facilities in the VA national grid—154 hospitals, 900 clinics, and 200 other facilities—would be targets for sell-off to capitalize on the “real estate potential” for each medical campus. Many VA hospitals were prime downtown real estate sites. CARES was implemented, with drastic losses in the national VA grid.

Thousands of VA staff and services are reliable, life-saving, and respected. But under Obama, the *policy at the top is to cause harm and destruction*. Treatments considered not cost effective, and health facilities considered “excessive” are being shut down for the whole population under Obamacare, and the VA is no exception.

Among the latest reports are the following.

**Arizona.** A whistleblower, Dr. Sam Foote, charged, in a report first posted by CNN on April 24, that at the Phoenix Veterans Medical Center, the management had a secret list of between 1,400 and 1,600 vets awaiting appointments—some for many months, while a fake list was forwarded to Congressional overseers and others in Washington, which fraudulently showed that the facility had been making appointments within the 14-day period. Foote estimates that at least 40 veterans died while waiting to see a primary care physician.

Even before the Phoenix story broke, the VA had admitted that at least 23 patients had died of gastrointestinal cancer, and dozens of others were injured, all because of delays in getting appointments.

**Texas.** Another whistleblower, Dr. Richard Krug-

man, charged that in the VA Health Care System in Harlingen, colonoscopies have been delayed, to the point of risking Stage 4 cancer. “That was done because of dollars and cents. For the VA, they have to be bleeding out of their rectum before they would authorize a colonoscopy. That was the standard of care,” he told the May 12 *Washington Examiner*. Krugman reckons as many as 15,000 veterans were affected by this policy; many have likely died. If they didn’t die in a VA hospital—the nearest one often being a four-hour drive away—they don’t show up on VA records, Dr. Krugman reported.

*Nationwide.* In December 2012, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report based on its review of four VA facilities—

Washington, D.C.; Harrison, Mont.; Dayton, Ohio; and Los Angeles, Calif. The report found that schedulers at these four facilities had been sidestepping the electronic appointment system, by tracking appointments on paper and failing to enter them into the electronic system, until they were within the 14-day window. Numerous reports on the problem date back to at least the year 2000, and it hasn’t been solved.

On May 8, the House Veterans Affairs Committee voted to subpoena e-mail correspondence and other material from the VA relating to delayed appointments and secret waiting lists. Committee chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) indicated that the committee had been seeking this material since April 24, but had received no response from the VA. “The last few weeks have been a model of VA stonewalling which precipitated the need for this subpoena,” he said.

### The DOD Is Doing the Same Thing

While the VA scandal has been splashed across the front pages, the Defense Department, which is supposed to be working closely with the VA to smooth the transition process of service members from active duty to veteran status, stands accused of its own misconduct. Robert Alvarez and Georg-Andreas Pogány, two veterans’ advocates (and both veterans themselves) based in Denver, filed a lawsuit on May 12, charging Army officials at Fort Carson, Colo. with unreasonably barring



*Veterans Affairs Secretary Gen. Eric Shinseki is taking the heat from Congress (as seen here May 15, being grilled by a Senate committee) for the scandal at the VA, but it’s the Obama Administration’s killer austerity policy that has gutted medical care for both the military and civilian population.*

them from access to their clients—soldiers facing adverse discharges for medical and psychological reasons—and falsifying their medical records to give them less than honorable discharges, a status which denies them post-discharge medical benefits from the DoD and the VA.

Alvarez and Pogány are the COO and CEO, respectively, of the Uniformed Services Justice and Advocacy Group (USJAG), and have been providing investigative, forensic, and advocacy services to soldiers facing administrative and judicial proceedings, and assisting them in securing their service-connected benefits. This includes obtaining accurate diagnoses and disability ratings so that they may receive health-care benefits after discharge from military service. The majority of their clients suffer from acute mental illness from traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and so are often not fully capable of understanding the proceedings to which they’re subjected.

According to the lawsuit, Alvarez and Pogány began identifying a pattern whereby the Army was increasing its use of administrative discharge procedures to expel soldiers for misconduct when, in reality, their misconduct stemmed from TBI, PTSD, or other injuries (including addiction to medications that were prescribed to them). When Alvarez and Pogány came into conflict with Fort Carson officials over

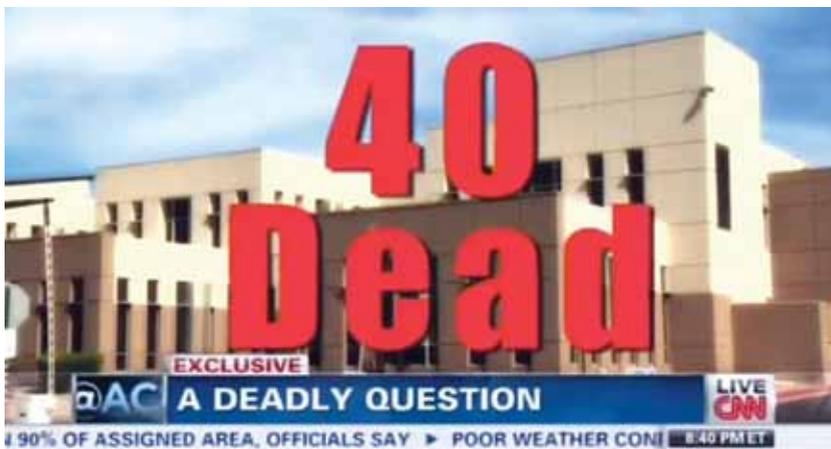
these cases, they reported the disputes to the Office of the Army Surgeon General, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, and to the relevant Congressional Committees; they also requested Army investigations of physicians and commanders at Fort Carson who were interfering with their clients' medical evaluation and treatment.

On Nov. 5, 2012, the two USJAG officers were barred from access to Fort Carson, and thus were denied access to many of their clients, to medical and other officials on the post whom they needed to interact with in order to gain information about their clients' cases, and to court martial and other legal proceedings involving their clients. Col.

David Grosso, the garrison commander at Fort Carson, claimed that they were "disruptive to the good order and discipline of the installation," though no evidence was ever produced to substantiate that charge.

According to the complaint, Alvarez and Pogány were then falsely accused of deceitful conduct, the accusations were an effort to undermine the work they were doing for soldiers who were facing a less than honorable characterization of their service and the ensuing loss of benefits. Though the complaint doesn't explicitly say so, the restriction of the two veterans' advocates from access to their clients potentially poses great harm to those soldiers. If a soldier cannot gain access to psychological and medical services that he needs as a result of his military service, he *is likely to be at greater risk of committing suicide*, a risk that otherwise might be mitigated or prevented altogether.

The lead defendant in the lawsuit is Lt. Gen. Joseph Anderson, who was the commander of Fort Carson in 2012, before he was reassigned to Fort Bragg in 2013 as the commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps. Anderson is currently in Afghanistan, serving as the ISAF Joint Commander, second only to ISAF Commander Gen. Joseph Dunford. Sinclair was the defendant, Anderson the convening authority. The judge found Anderson had exercised unlawful command influence. Before he left Fort Bragg, Anderson was accused of exercising unlawful command influence in the sexual assault case against Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sinclair, by the military judge in that case.



*While there has been intense media coverage of the VA scandal, most have failed to examine the past decade's takedown of veterans' health care, as the Cheney-Bush-Obama war machine ground up millions of lives.*

Pogány told *EIR* in a phone conversation on May 14, that the purpose of this Army behavior, which he characterized as "reprehensible" and "criminal," is to get rid of these soldiers, and to deny them their benefits. He said this goes back to at least 2011, but really 2006. Pogány does not make any allegations with respect to cases that he has not worked on, but he noted that the Army is under tremendous pressure to slash its budget, and to get rid of people. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and other senior leaders of the department have made it clear that personnel and health-care costs are their number one target for meeting the budgetary targets, stemming from the budget sequestration and related shenanigans. Weapons programs are protected, but, "If you get rid of individuals, no one will connect the dots," Pogány said.

The Army is on track to eliminate 30,000 soldiers from the VA system between now and the end of fiscal year 2015. To do this, they're going after the "low hanging fruit," first, that is, those who are psychologically compromised. If they're discharged under less than honorable conditions, thus becoming ineligible for benefits, it "saves" the government money. Individuals who are at risk of violent behavior, ranging from spousal and child abuse to homicide and suicide, are dumped into the civilian population without access to treatment, where then local authorities have to deal with the consequences.

This danger is exacerbated by the U.S. economy's decline, which means an overwhelming number of these soldiers cannot find decent jobs.

## Shinseki Testifies

On May 15, Shinseki went before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to answer questions about the appointments scandal and about VA health care in general. The members of the committee were unified in their outrage at allegations that veterans may be dying because they're unable to access the VA health-care system.

"[W]ith the numerous GAO, IG, and Office of Medical Inspector reports that have been released, VA senior leadership, including the Secretary, should have been aware that VA was facing a national scheduling crisis," said Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.). "VA's leadership has either failed to connect the dots or failed to address this ongoing crisis which has resulted in patient harm and in patient death."

Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) noted that the allegations from Phoenix are not new issues. "They are deep, system-wide problems and they grow more concerning every day," she said, and pointed to a long series of IG and GAO reports dating back to 2000, showing problems with the appointment system, and the resulting lengthy waiting periods, especially for mental-health appointments. "Clearly, this problem has gone on far

too long," she said. "It is unfortunate that these leadership failures have dramatically shaken many veterans' confidence in this system."

Committee chairman Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) was more cautious, urging members and the public to avoid a rush to judgment, but in his questioning of Shinseki, he was clearly irritated by what Burr and Murray both pointed to, that the problem of waiting times for appointments has been around a long time, has been repeatedly cited by various investigations, and yet it hasn't gotten any better.

All the Senators, however, ignored the real cause of the problem: the toleration of a President and an economic policy which throws human beings on the scrapheap as a matter of policy, while succoring the financial sector which has driven the physical economy into the ground. To meet the needs of veterans, and all other vulnerable members of society, that economy must be rebuilt, wars stopped, and scientific progress put back at the center of national policy. If that priority is not addressed, the killing will continue, and get worse.

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